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ABSTRACT

Slogans are commonly used to advocate a point or view or a political stance. In education many slogans are used. One of these is the phrase "research shows that..." Many issues must be considered in interpreting research results, and the statement must be considered carefully. "Cooperative learning" is a slogan often advanced, but teachers must not fail to recognize the different learning styles and diverse intelligences of students. "Whole language versus phonics instruction" has been an ongoing debate, but the probable answer is that neither approach is totally correct. Heterogeneous grouping is another often discussed issue, but provisions must be made to give each student, including the gifted, the opportunity to learn and develop as well as possible. "High standards and high expectations" is a slogan often heard, but what these standards are to be and what expectations should really be need further definition. "Focus on academics only" is a slogan that ignores the necessity of teaching students skills and a breadth of knowledge as preparation for life. Competition to improve the public schools as the key to improved opportunities for all is a slogan that supports alternative schools, but the many questions surrounding the use of public moneys to pay for alternative schooling must be explored. Slogans that compare the public schools with other societal institutions fail to take into account the special requirements of educational facilities. Many who comment on education praise what is happening in other fields while minimizing the accomplishments of the educational system. It is difficult to compare teaching to other types of professional work, but like any profession, the profession of education must work to improve. (SLD)

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Analyzing Slogans to Aid Student School Achievement

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ANALYZING SLOGANS TO AID STUDENT SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Slogans are used quite commonly in society to advocate a point of view or a political stance. The following appear on bumper stickers to sway pubic opinion:

1. guns don't kill, people do.
2. don't tell me how to use my guns, I will decide that.
3. I fight poverty, I work.
4. Let's get rid of the welfare cheats.
5. The right to bear arms is my motto.

In education and the public schools, there are numerous slogans stressed. these will now be analyzed.

Research Shows That .....

Very frequently a writer or speaker will indicate that research shows that Method A is better than Method B. There are many weaknesses when making statements pertaining to research says that -- ---------- .

1. which test or evaluation procedure was used to determine that one approach is superior to the other? If standardized or criterion referenced tests are used to determine differences between two or more groups, each has its multiple weaknesses including validity and/or reliability. Constructivist philosophy does not agree with using tests to ascertain achievement. Rather, portfolios are recommended. Even if Method A is superior to Method B, there still are students in Method A that did not achieve well. This can be quickly noticed when comparing pretest versus post test results in the Method A group.

2. the conditions for students in Method A are not the same as for students in Method B. One can think of an endless number of variables where students in Method A have different educational environments as contrasted with Method B students, such as quality and number of teaching materials, condition of each school building/classroom, teacher qualities between the two groups, different socio-economic levels between Method A as compared to Method B students, among others. The theory of random sampling is often quoted as an ideal if the research can use it in research studies. However, it is not possible to use random sampling in many cases and intact groups have to be used. then the differences initially between Method A versus Method B students may indeed be great. Analysis of co-variance may be used to equate the two groups so that the starting point is the same/similar, but how accurate is analysis of co-variance? Then too, the theory of random sampling certainly has its many weaknesses with sampling error, because each random sample selected will differ from sequential

samples.

3. rarely are completed research studies analyzed by the writer of a published article. Generally, a writer will foot note studies that confirm his/her beliefs. Thus, it is no wonder that research says that "whole language approaches are better that phonics approaches," or vice versa.

Cooperative Learning

Advocates of cooperative learning state that students do better with cooperative learning as compared to working individually on school tasks. Even if the majority like to work cooperatively, there will always be dissenters who prefer individual endeavors. When the author attended the public schools from 1934-1946, all work by a student was to be done individually. Working together with others was considered cheating. My public school education, leaving out personal opinions, did assist me to receive a Doctorate in Education, teach 42 years, and continue writing and publishing after becoming professor of education emeritus, with a total of 2,310 manuscripts accepted for publication. The author holds memberships in ten national and state educational organizations presently. His interest in reading and research in education is probably greater than ever.

Gardner (1993) identified eight intelligences. Two of which are interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal intelligence stresses learners doing better in achievement working with others as compared to those possessing intrapersonal intelligence who achieve more optimally working by the self. This indicates that selected students achieve more optimally in group work whereas others achieve in a more optimal manner individually. Even if in a quality research study, if Experimental Group A with cooperative learning achieves significantly higher than individual methods of learning, there are still students within Experimental Group A that did achieve better with individualized methods of instruction. Again, by examining pre and post test scores, one can notice in Experimental group A those who did not do well in cooperative learning. Rather than endorsing cooperative learning en toto, teachers need to study and provide for students with different learning styles and diverse intelligences. Thus, emphasizing dogmatically the goodness of cooperative learning for all might not be a wise decision at all.

Whole Language Versus Phonics Instruction

This debate has been going on for some time. Again, it has become an either/or approach in teaching. Should all students then receive reading instruction using whole language procedures? Or, should each student receive a systematic procedure of phonics instruction? Probably,

neither answer is correct. What is important is to meet student needs in reading instruction. Based on needs, selected students in beginning reading may do well with almost zero phonics. Others will need phonics instruction to become independent readers in unlocking unknown words in reading content. The teacher then needs to diagnose what, specifically, a students needs to become a better reader.

Reading teachers need to be flexible in their thinking when teaching students. One size does not fit all. Students differ from each other in numerous ways and the teacher needs to capitalize on learner strengths as well as remedy deficiencies (See Ediger, 2000, 20-29).

Heterogeneous Grouping

Advocates of heterogeneously grouped students have been quite vocal in stressing the goodness of all instruction being in heterogeneous or mixed achievement levels of instruction. These advocates use synonymous terms such as tracking, ability grouping, and homogeneous grouping as being sinful. An either/or approach seemingly does not work in teaching students. Certainly, there are times for both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouped instruction. Young leaners then may be grouped homogeneously for the teaching of reading and heterogeneously for social studies. In society, each person interacts with others regardless of ability levels and also seeks out individuals with like abilities, interests, and values. Adults then do not, by any means, interact continuously with heterogeneous groups. Why should students in the public schools? The key is to develop feelings of respect and caring for all, rather than a strict heterogeneous/homogeneous dichotomy of instruction. Each student needs to achieve as much as possible. Grouping procedures should stress that objective. Gifted/talented pupils should not be expected to help other only, in heterogeneous grouping. Rather, each student needs a unique curriculum to learn from and develop as well as possible (See Ediger, 1999, 233-240).

High Standards and High Expectations

Advocates of high standards (objectives) and high expectations for student learning believe that there is too much laxness in student achievement. The bar needs to be raised so that the United States is competitive with other nations economically in the world. World Class standards need to be in the offing. States need to take it upon themselves to set high standards for students to achieve. How high these standards should be set is not clear. In fact, it is indeed vague. Several states have set very high standards, making for much student failure. Standards could be set so high that almost all students fail or the

opposite could be done whereby standards are at a low level making for a considerable success rate of achievement.

The same can be said of expectations of students for achievement. Thus, the expectations from teachers can be too high or too low. Educating students is not like physics whereby matter being considered can be measured and is relatively stable in its outcomes.
Human beings are much more unpredictable. Each person has feelings, values, desires, interests, and abilities that may differ from others. Since there are so many differences among learners, it behooves educators to realize that one size does not fit all --- such as in high standards and high expectations from all students in academic achievement (See Ediger, 2000, 112-119).

Scope in the Curriculum

The scope pertains to the breadth of knowledge and skills taught in ongoing lessons and units of study. There are advocates of teaching the academics. Thus, the slogan is "focus upon the academics only."
The chances are this curriculum is much too narrow for most students. Why?

1. many will not benefit presently nor be employed in work involving the academics in the future.
2. there is more to life than the academics only, such as character education, ethics, citizenship, as well as respect and caring for others.
3. excellent vocations abound in which academic knowledge is not, by any means, the major ingredient.
4. also, beyond the academics, good human relations are important now as well as at the future work place.
5. feelings of belonging and esteem needs of individuals must be met. Individuals possess feelings and must have vital needs met.

The academics are important, but so are important skills as well as vital attitudes.

Competition to Improve the Public Schools

There is criticism of public schools in that competition is lacking in providing for educational needs of students. There are numerous rivals today but these are private and parochial schools whereby tuition fees need to be paid for attendance. The beliefs are that if public school moneys could go to schools of choice by parents for their offspring, then educational opportunities could improve for all. Competition in a free enterprise system is the key to improved opportunities for all is a slogan according to advocates of alternative schools.

Alternative schools come in several forms. First, charter schools

may and do receive public school moneys to establish an alternative system of schooling. These schools are not subject to the red tape of the pubic schools, but can be creative and innovative. Many states have laws encouraging charter schools. Second, alternative schools may also involve education for profit whereby a commercial company may provide the contractual agreement with a school board to provide objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures for students. Third, tuition vouchers may be used by parents to send their offspring to a school of their choice. The receiving school might be either private and secular or religious. Although, separation of church and state is an issue here which will continually need to be resolved.

There are definite questions that need to be answered about alternative schools in which public money is used to pay tuition for attending students.

1. how will parents know which kind of education is best for their offspring? Charter, for profit, or tuition voucher?
2. will poor parents have adequate income to provide for transportation needs when sending a student to a private/parochial school through a tuition voucher plan?
3. are for profit schools truly interested in teaching students for optimal achievement or is the profit motive the major goal for their being?

Major questions then pertaining to alternative schools deal with the following queries:

1. Will students achieve more optimally as compared to the public schools or is this a fad which will come and go?
2. Will critics of the pubic school system, as they presently appear to be dissatisfied with learner achievement, become increasingly satisfied with student progress in alternative schools? Or have schools become scapegoats in society?
3. Will alternative schools siphon off the higher achievers and leave the public schools with lower achievers and handicapped students which are much more costly to educate?
4. Will appropriate measurement/portfolio procedures be used to ascertain learner achievement in public schools as compared to alternative schools in order to truly indicate which are in a better position to assist students in developing well intellectually, socially, morally, attitudinally, as well as physically?
5. Will parents work together well with teachers in alternative schools so that students may attain as well as possible?

Comparing the Public Schools with other Institutions in Society

Too frequently, writers in education wish to extol the goodness of other institutions and minimize the positive contributions of the public schools. Many times, ineffective teaching occurs due to skimping on money spent on public school education.

The author perceives the following problems, among others, which need remedying so that each student might have chances to learn as much as possible:

1. poor quality school buildings which need repair. The author taught in a two room school house where the well ran dry, especially if the electric pump kept running when when the toilet stools did not shut off. The school was without water for the rest of the school day or days. The county superintendent recommended that the stools not be flushed and the school stay in session. That was truly a very bad recommendation when considering odor and health factors. Two years before that time, I taught in a one room school with outdoor privies. In between, I taught at Friends Boy's School in Ramallah, West Bank in the nation of Jordan. Here were sanitary facilities for students in school in a nation where approximately fifty percent were Palestinian Arab refugees with much poverty! The author was perplexed why a wealthy nation such as the US could have such poor sanitary school facilities as compared to a land of refugees and poverty.

The author still reads about schools in the US where toilet stools do not flush properly.

2. After returning to the US to teach, I taught in a small city school where the school roof leaked very badly. Four to five buckets were set in a classroom to catch the dripping rain. Preparation for teaching was done thoroughly and well, but the drips of rain water into the buckets made the plink, plank, and plunk sounds. Students perhaps, should have written poetry with alliteration to copy the sounds made of dripping water that very wet spring.

The author still reads educational literature and hears directly about leaky roofs on school buildings.

3. In the same building, number 2 above, steam radiator pipes provided heat for the school . One thing that can be said was that the building was either too hot or too could in winter. No comments will be made on the temperature readings in early September and in the month of May. Perhaps, the most distracting feature of steam radiators is the banging noise of the pipes. The expansion and contraction of the amount of steam heat going through the pipes made for these loud banging sounds. The sounds made resembled someone hitting furiously on the pipes with a hammer to distract the teaching that was going on. Again the quality of teaching was well prepared but the school facilities were weighed and found wanting!

Too many outdated school facilities still use steam heat or the heating system does not work properly.

4. One large school system in the United States did not have textbooks available for pupils as of December 10 of the "new" school year. The reason for not having texts available was not due to frowning upon textbook use, but rather to a lack of money in placing orders for teaching materials.

The Grass Is Greener On The Other Side

Very frequently, writers and speakers on educational topics will glory in what the other professions are doing and what education fails to do. These arguments can easily be refuted. Some of the "grass is greener" comments include the following:

1. "the legal profession has state wide tests for prospective attorneys to pass; therefore the legal profession is recognized as truly being a profession."

The legal profession has undue problems. Inmates on death row have been executed and later, after death, have been found to be innocent. One state has even proclaimed a moratorium on executions due to these factors. Court room decisions, also, certainly have their many weaknesses when innocent people have been incarcerated for years and later proved innocent with DNA testing results. Approximately, forty per cent of inmates on death row in the US received incompetent legal assistance in their court room trial (Public Broadcasting Service ---- PBS-- News, July 13, 2000).

2. "consumer satisfaction is stressed with accountability in the business world. Education should copy this model." The writer has too many complaints of products purchased from the business world and these complaints would be much too numerous to write up for this manuscript. Consumer complaint departments in business lack politeness and acceptance of people. There are many complaints from consumers on shoddy products purchased in society

3. "school administrators should follow models from executives in business; more school administrators should come from the business world." The writer feels it should be the other way around. School administrator salaries are meager as compared to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). No school district could afford to pay the millions given a CEO in the business world. Severance pay for a CEO may be in the millions of dollars. These huge salaries are given even if a company is not doing well financially. The author would like to see more public school administrators become CEOs. There might then be more stability in the business world and not moving companies to new areas and

tearing families apart.

4. "hospitals provide an excellent model for teaching which schools should adopt." Not really. About 30 % of the prescriptions given to patients in a hospital are given to the wrong individuals. Public Broadcasting Service contains commentaries by Charles Olander entitled, "From the other end of the stethoscope." Here in these commentaries, nurses and medical doctors are not pictured as being an ideal to follow. Almost each person has nightmare kinds of experiences pertaining to the medical profession.

5. "coaches are able to do what is successful through methods used." Coaches work with the best of players who already have developed their skills, even the beginners in high school athletics. They do not work with those who are at the bottom of achievement as would be true of teachers working with impaired individuals in mental development, hearing, speech, and physical growth, among other deficiencies. Neither do coaches work with behaviorally disordered in the athletic domain.

It is truly difficult to compare teaching with other lines of professional work. The comparisons made are not logical and do compare toys with bananas or apples with oranges. Teaching is its very own profession and has its own unique problems to solve. It has its own objectives, learning opportunities, psychology, philosophy, methodology, and evaluation procedures. It is good to try to make connections and learn from other fields of endeavor to make logical comparisons. The profession of education must truly try to improve continuously as should other types of work and professions. Nothing should remain stable, but be subject to needed continuous change. Changes for the sake of making each change should not be a part of teaching and learning situations in public schools, but changes are made with a purpose in mind.

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